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Allied deception operations in Hungary

THE TANGLED WEB

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Though fraud in other activities be detestable, in the management of war it is laudable and glorious, and he who overcomes the enemy by fraud is as much to be praised as he who does so by force.

—Niccolo Machiavelli, 1469-1527

The role of intelligence is vital to every aspect of deception operations from preliminary planning through each phase of execution. As intelligence is usually the principal target for hostile deceptions, an intelligence planner or analyst must be particularly aware that the intelligence with which he works can result from deception schemes initiated by his adversaries. Intelligence professionals can become knowledgeable concerning deception operations from study and analysis of past operations as well as from experience gained in their work.

A *strategic* deception may be said to have occurred whenever a nation, alliance, or coalition of powers, has deliberately misled its adversaries over some extended period of time concerning its strategic objectives or its capabilities to achieve those objectives. Deceptions which involve intentions are always more difficult to detect because the intent of a nation's leaders to achieve some particular objective may appear to be obvious at one time, only to have the nation later do something completely different. It is possible that deception has occurred, but it is also possible the change resulted from a shift in policy or a new leadership.

In deception operations two basic, almost self-evident principles are fundamental to success. One such principle came to be known during the Second World War as the *Magruder Principle*, after the staff officer who first described it as "telling the enemy what he already wants to believe." Magruder did not confine this precept only to things the target wanted to believe but included also what the target was inclined, or predisposed to believe. Another basic principle, the *rational core*, requires that in any successful deception, there must always exist a central core of accurate, verifiable information. Post-war Czechoslovakian defector (and one-time head of the Czech Disinformation Section) Ladislav Bittman discussed this important point as follows:

For disinformation campaigns to be successful, they must at least partially correspond to reality or generally accepted views. A rational core is especially important when the recipient enemy or victim is a seasoned veteran in such matters because without a considerable degree of plausible verifiable information and facts, it is impossible to gain his confidence. Not until this rational skeleton has been established is it fleshed out with the relevant disinformation.

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Strategic deceptions can serve more than one purpose, depending upon the context in which the deception is employed.¹ During World War II, the Allies fighting Hitler and his Axis partners employed a comprehensive deception plan, originally codenamed PLAN JAELE. Following the 1943 Tehran Conference, the codename was changed to BODYGUARD after Winston Churchill remarked, "In wartime, truth is so precious she must always be attended by a bodyguard of lies."

In the summer of 1943, another one of the early BODYGUARD plans, HUSKY, was employed successfully in support of the invasion of Sicily. A deception, codenamed OPERATION MINCEMEAT, used a corpse equipped with false but convincing battle plans and identified as Major William Martin, 09650, Royal Marines. The body of "Major Martin" was washed ashore in Spain where British Intelligence knew German agents would receive the plans quickly. MINCEMEAT helped to persuade the German staff that the Allies planned operations elsewhere rather than Sicily. The planning and execution of MINCEMEAT gave needed experience and encouragement to the Allied planners and intelligence staffs.

In advance of the June 1944 Allied invasion of Normandy, another of the BODYGUARD plans, FORTITUDE, proved successful in convincing Nazi leadership not only of a false debarkation area in France, but also that major tactical and strategic threats existed in Scandinavia (FORTITUDE NORTH) and in the Balkans (PLAN ZEPPELIN). Success of FORTITUDE plans caused Hitler to deny his generals permission to reinforce defenses in the main attack areas in Normandy and forced them to deploy their forces far from the battlefield. It became clear, as events unfolded in response to deception operations, that Hitler, von Rundstedt, Rommel and other German leaders were prepared to accept the deception myths as reality because each, for different reasons and purposes, was predisposed to believe the myths.

The discussion that follows will focus on Allied and German operations in Hungary. It will show the development and execution of Allied strategic deceptions under PLAN ZEPPELIN, German responses to the Allied deceptions, and illustrate how these activities affected the outcome of the war.

Historical Background

In preparing a deception plan which would cause Nazi leaders to divert resources into the Balkan-Carpathian areas, particularly Hungary, planners had to consider the regional history and background of events leading up to the Second World War.

The Hungarian nation had always been isolated from neighboring states by its exotic language and culture. Because of her geo-strategic location,

¹ Planners engaged in deceptions must exercise great care to ensure that an operation that can be successful on a short-term basis does not provoke some response which would adversely affect long-term goals. For example, in the 1930s Adolf Hitler sought to convince European powers that his military strength had increased significantly so that they might be intimidated and not oppose his short-term goals. His actions in support of this, however, provoked them into rearmament programs, which was the last thing he desired to happen. Hitler was then forced into costly propaganda campaigns in order to quiet their fears.

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Hungary was successively invaded and occupied by the Huns, Mongols, Turks and Austrians. An Apostolic Kingdom with close ties to the Roman Catholic Church, Hungary also contained large Protestant and Jewish minorities. After an Ottoman Turkish occupation of 150 years ended in 1686, Hungarians came under Austrian Hapsburg domination. The Hungarians proved to be increasingly troublesome subjects for the Hapsburgs and, during the Dual Monarchy (1857-1918), they were equally troublesome allies.

Following the World War I defeat of the Central Powers, Germany and Austria-Hungary, there occurred a series of events that would determine Hungary's future role. After the 1918 Armistice, the Austrian King-Emperor, Charles IV, proclaimed a Social Democratic Republic in Hungary headed by Count Károlyi. This republic survived for less than a year before being overthrown by a communist revolt led by Béla Kún. Kún's communist government collapsed after 133 days. In the turmoil and confusion attending collapse of the communist revolution, an interim government was formed in March 1920, and Admiral Miklos Horthy was elected as regent and provisional head of state.

The victors in World War I relocated most of the European national boundaries. All of the nations allied with Germany were affected to some degree, but none more than Hungary. Prior to the Treaty of Trianon which Horthy was forced to sign in June 1920, Hungary consisted of a territory of some 125,641 square miles. The Trianon Treaty reduced Hungary's territory to some 35,863 square miles. The largest portion of the lost territory went to Romania and the new nations of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. Poland and Italy received smaller portions of Hungarian territory. Thus, Hungary declined from a pre-war population of more than 20 million to 9.5 million and lost more than 3 million ethnic Hungarian citizens.

During 1927, Hungary signed a Treaty of Friendship with Italy. This act initiated a drift in her international relations which would later carry her into the Berlin-Rome Axis. The drift accelerated after 1938 when the Western Allies rejected Hungarian claims against Czechoslovakia.

Admiral Horthy tried to keep his country out of World War II. In 1938, while attending a naval review in Kiel, he bluntly told Hitler if Germany got into a war, she was bound to lose. When the war began, Horthy refused Hitler permission to cross Hungarian territory with his forces. In 1940, Hungary joined in the Tripartite Pact and signed a Treaty of Eternal Friendship with Yugoslavia. When Hitler launched his attack against Yugoslavia, Horthy initially refused permission for German forces to transit Hungary but then yielded, a grave decision which moved his Prime Minister, Count Teleki, to commit suicide. The following June, Hungarians were also forced to provide a token force when Hitler attacked the Soviet Union in what was expected to be another quick German victory.

By early 1942, however, Soviet resistance was sufficiently strong that Hitler forced Horthy to commit his entire military force to the Russian campaign. With both Great Britain and the United States now allied with the Soviets and at war with Hungary, Horthy and his close associates were convinced the Western Allies would emerge victorious and were anxious to

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have an open line to Western leaders. The Hungarians also had very serious reservations concerning the Soviets.²

In 1942, Admiral Horthy persuaded Miklos Kallay to become his new Prime Minister. Kállay immediately made overtures to the West for a separate peace. His approach was founded on the erroneous supposition that British and American forces would reach the Hungarian frontier by the beginning of 1944, or possibly earlier. The situation would then make it possible for Hungary to join the alliance against Germany as the Italians had been able to do.

Some contacts were made with the West in 1942, but official talks did not begin until 1943, when the Hungarian journalist, Andrew Frey, was sent by Kallay to contact British and American diplomats in Istanbul. Later, Laszlo Veress, a diplomat, was also dispatched to Istanbul with a message to be delivered through the British Ambassador which stated that Hungary would not resist the allies if their forces reached the Hungarian frontier, and that instead, Hungarian soldiers would then turn against the Germans.

Early in 1943, Western Allies received overtures from Hungarians in Canada, Sweden, Turkey, Portugal, Switzerland and the Vatican. Allied intelligence staffs concluded that most of the overtures were independent and uncoordinated. It was also known that one of the Hungarian emissaries, Colonel Otto von Hatz, the Military Attache in Istanbul, was under control of the German Security Service. All of the Allied intelligence assessments agreed that if Hitler became convinced that Hungarians were about to defect, he would take immediate steps to occupy the country with German troops.

At this time, the Senior Deception Staff possessed the basic elements needed to implement PLAN ZEPPELIN in Hungary. The Hungarians as reluctant allies of the Germans were searching for a way out of their worsening situation. Hitler, who never trusted the Hungarians, was well aware of their desires and details of their negotiations, and was predisposed to overestimate the strategic importance of Hungary. The Germans were also aware that the "Balkan route to Vienna," an alternative operations plan advocated by Winston Churchill, called for Allied landings along the Adriatic Coast. (The "Balkan Route" had been rejected by the Allies in 1943 when the ANVIL/DRAGOON operation to land in Southern France was adopted.) Thus, the deception planners could employ the *Magruder Principle* and tell Hitler what he was inclined to believe already and continue to reinforce a "rational core" of intelligence indicating both a potential Hungarian revolt, or defection, as well as Allied operations in the Balkan-Carpathian region.

After 1938, from territories that had come under Nazi control, all German requirements for strategic materials could be met. Because the Germans had suffered military reverses in 1942 and 1943, however, Hitler and his staff were increasingly concerned about the availability of strategic resources such as copper, chrome, bauxite and especially petroleum produced in the Balkan-Carpathian region. (In 1943, German synthetic oil production had peaked to

² Hungarians disliked and feared the Russians. The Tsar had dispatched troops in 1848 to crush the abortive Hungarian revolt against the Hapsburgs and Hungarian troops had fought against the Russians in the 1914-1918 war.

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some 6.3 million tons per year, Romanian oil production provided an additional 2.4 million tons, and Hungarian deliveries had increased to about 0.8 million tons.)

Petroleum supplies for Germany were drastically reduced in early April 1943 when US bombers based in the Mediterranean began attacks on the Ploesti oilfields in Romania as well as on water traffic on the Danube River. By the end of May, Romanian production was reduced by one-half, and the relatively small Hungarian petroleum production became increasingly important. Hitler's concerns for the Balkan-Carpathian region were intensified. During the same period, Western deception operations under PLAN ZEPPELIN encouraged belief in Berlin that the Allies intended to advance into Germany, not only across the English Channel, but also through the Ljubljana Gap in Yugoslavia. German intelligence had reports that General George Patton was preparing to lead the Seventh US Army ashore near Trieste.³

Hungary Increasingly Desperate

On 17 August 1943, Deszo Újvary, Hungarian Consul General in Istanbul, told Sterndale Bennett, the British Minister, that Hungary had decided that it could accept the so-called Casablanca Formula for unconditional surrender and requested that Bennett so inform the other Allies. Újvary emphasized that surrender was practicable only if the military situation made it possible. (Újvary made it clear that Hungary would surrender only when Allied troops reached the Hungarian frontier.) On 9 September, the British Minister responded on behalf of the Allied governments and informed the Hungarians that in order for any terms to be considered for acceptance, the following must be included:

- Allied aircraft were to be facilitated in their operations over Hungary and not attacked or intercepted in any way;
- Secret radio communications were to be established immediately;
- All further discussions were to be conducted through Gyorgy Bakack-Besseney, the Hungarian Ambassador in Berne.

Kállay's efforts to negotiate some understanding with the West were encouraged by the Allies. Late in 1943, arrangements were made for British Army Colonel Charles Telfer Howie to escape from a POW camp in Silesia. Howie walked south to the Danube and was joined on his travels by a British Army Sergeant, Tibor Weinstein, a skilled radio operator who spoke fluent German and Hungarian (and who had been living in Budapest until 1937). Howie and Weinstein arrived in Budapest and were installed by Kállay in the Royal Palace and equipped with a radio. They were directed to contact the Royal Navy in Malta and arrange for reception of Kállay's representatives with new proposals for Hungarian peace terms. The British staff, which was coordinating with the other Western Allies in prosecuting PLAN ZEPPELIN,

³ Actually, the Seventh Army was not then an effective force. Patton would assume command of the Third US Army in France, and Seventh Army would be activated under command of General Alexander M. Patch, for landings on the French Mediterranean coast.

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knew the German leadership was aware of many of the Hungarian overtures and believed Allied forces were preparing for a Balkan invasion. The British continued their contacts with Kallay knowing that the German counterintelligence was monitoring his activities.

Operation Sparrow

During the period between June 1943 and August 1944, several British Special Operations teams and one combined British-American team had been parachuted into Hungary on various covert and clandestine missions. These and other assets from OSS, SOE and SAS were co-opted by the ZEPPELIN planners to ensure that their operations in Hungary were compatible with the concurrent deception operations.

During the autumn of 1943, the OSS staff in Cairo developed a plan that had the objectives of producing either an anti-Nazi revolt in Hungary or a Hungarian defection from the war. The plan, later codenamed OPERATION SPARROW, required an OSS team to be parachuted into Hungary to deal with high-level Hungarian authorities in pursuit of those objectives. The idea for SPARROW originated from a proposal made by the Hungarian Military Attache in Istanbul, Colonel Otto von Hatz. Hatz had infiltrated an OSS intelligence net run out of Istanbul and through this net (codenamed CEREUS) suggested a plan that would bring about Hungary's withdrawal from the Axis. While there was some suspicion regarding Hatz in the Istanbul Station, neither OSS Istanbul nor Cairo staffs became aware that Hatz was a German agent until the Cereus net and its principal agent, Dogwood, were compromised. (Hatz' duplicity was known in Berne and OSS Headquarters in Washington. Although Istanbul Station was warned about dealing with Hatz, the warning was apparently disregarded due to enthusiasm in Istanbul Station for OPERATION SPARROW).

After the compromise of CEREUS/Dogwood was revealed, SIS insisted that since Hatz had been a German agent when he proposed what became OPERATION SPARROW, then SPARROW was also compromised—in fact, that it was a German idea, designed to result in the exposure of Allied agents. The deception operators countered that:

1. SPARROW might work anyway, i.e., there was a possibility that a Hungarian revolt or defection could occur.
2. The Americans doubted that the Germans had initiated the SPARROW plan.⁴
3. The fact that the Germans knew (through Hatz) about SPARROW enhanced deception being promoted by PLAN ZEPPELIN.

The decision was made to continue with OPERATION SPARROW. As of February 1944, General Donovan had ordered the control and direction of

⁴ In the aftermath of the debacle in which the Istanbul Station had lost most of its credibility as well as its agents in Europe, Frank Wisner, well-known for his work in counterespionage (X-2), was sent to Istanbul as Station Chief to straighten things out. Wisner's investigation revealed that when the curtain fell on CEREUS/Dogwood Hatz had disappeared and counterintelligence turned up evidence indicating that he had been working for the Russians all along.

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SPARROW to be transferred to Allen Dulles in Berne. Dulles was in contact with a number of individuals and groups in Germany and German-occupied areas seeking to negotiate with the Allies for surrender. (This was one of the reasons why the earlier Allied response to the Hungarians had directed them to channel their efforts through their emissary in Berne).

The importance of adequate counterintelligence cannot be overemphasized. More effective counterintelligence would have limited the damage done by the Hungarian Colonel von Hatz in the course of these operations. Hatz' actions, despite his somewhat peripheral role, are nonetheless interesting. He was able to present the Germans, by whom he was paid and with whom he was allied, a plan that he could represent would deliver Allied agents into their hands and also expose Hungarians collaborating with the West. To the Russians, with whom he was working for a long time, he could offer the possibility of eliminating agents from the West and using the Germans to accomplish this. Since one of the objectives of Western Allied planning was to provide credible Social Democratic and anti-communist leadership for the postwar era, the elimination of intelligence networks in operational areas, such as Hungary, left the communist resistance to operate without significant competition. The price for deception of Nazi leaders and diversion of German military resources in this case would have to be paid by the Western Allies in the future. What Hatz was really up to is more difficult to judge. He was in a position to conclude that the possibility of the Western Allies moving into Hungary was remote, at best. He was certainly well aware that his Hungarian superiors believed the German cause was lost and probably believed this too. While Hatz may have been a long-time Soviet agent, either out of political conviction, or because he believed that the Soviets would be the principal power in his homeland in the future, it is also possible that he just wanted to be on the winning side and was feathering his own nest. Von Hatz was closely associated with General Kuthy, the Hungarian officer responsible for Signal Intelligence, and the German Intelligence Chief, Hoettl, was inclined to be suspicious of both Kuthy and Hatz. According to an official report made by Hoettl, after 15 October 1944, both Kuthy and von Hatz (who was now calling himself "Hatzeghy" without the "von") were unmasked as Soviet agents. A later report by Hoettl indicated that Hatzeghy became deputy chief of staff in the Bolshevik-Hungarian army, "but for all his cleverness he lost the confidence of the Russians even more quickly than Kuthy, and vanished forever in a Russian prison." (The Romanians have an old saying, "If you have a Hungarian for a friend, you don't need any enemies." Hatz' behavior lends credence to this view.)

On Monday, 13 March 1944, OSS Team Sparrow dropped from an RAF Halifax into Hungary, near the town of Nagykanizsa, close to the Yugoslav border. The team members had not been told that the Germans probably knew of their mission, but were instructed to establish contact with General Ujzaszy, Chief of Hungarian Military Intelligence and Security, to negotiate for the Hungarians to break their alliance with the Germans and join the Western Allies.

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On the Friday following their arrival in Hungary, the SPARROW team, commanded by Army Colonel Florimond Duke, assisted by Major Alfred Suarez and Captain Guy Nunn, met with General Újzaszy who informed them they would be negotiating with two Cabinet Ministers who were away from the capital over the weekend and would return in two days. On Sunday, Újzaszy summoned the team and informed them that the Germans had invaded Hungary; Budapest was surrounded and they must now consider themselves to be prisoners of war.

Hitler Had Swallowed the Bait

Hitler had learned of the dispatch of the SPARROW mission to Hungary from his Intelligence Service. Wilhelm Hoettl had been in Budapest as Chief of the German Security Service for Southern Europe. In his postwar memoirs, Hoettl said, "I was well-informed by Hungarian intelligence officers about all these negotiations (between the British SOE, the American OSS and Hungarian dissidents) and, in particular, the liaison between General Újzaszy and the American Colonel." Hoettl had reported these events to Berlin, and persuaded Hitler that Hungarian defection was imminent. According to Hoettl, the Fuhrer told his staff, "the intention of Hungary to conclude a separate peace must be thwarted if the southern section of the Eastern Front were not to be placed in the greatest danger."

The German occupation of Hungary ended the mission of the SPARROW team, whose members narrowly escaped execution. With some assistance from a German officer, they obtained treatment as prisoners of war and were transferred to Colditz Castle, near Leipzig, where they spent the remainder of the war. Újzaszy and an associate, Janos Kádár, were jailed for their part in SPARROW. Shortly thereafter, Újzaszy began working with Hungarian communists seeking to activate the Popular Front (a loose agglomeration of parties and individuals, temporarily united in anti-Nazi resistance) into liaison with the Soviets. Újzaszy, through his mistress, Katalin Kárády, a famous actress, was put in touch with Imre Kovacs, a Popular Front activist. Kovacs then put Újzaszy into contact with Laszlo Rajk, leader of the underground communist movement who enlisted Újzaszy in the cause. This started Újzaszy down a road that led him ultimately to Moscow. He was later heard broadcasting over Moscow radio and affidavits bearing his name were submitted in the Nuremberg war crimes trials. Újzaszy was never seen or heard from again after the war and his Hungarian friends assumed he had been executed.

The German invasion in March 1944 was timed to coincide with a conference in Berchtesgaden to which Admiral Horthy had been summoned.⁵ When Horthy returned to Budapest, he was greeted by a German military honor guard and informed that his Minister of Interior, along with many prominent citizens and members of Parliament, had been arrested, and the country was under occupation rule. Horthy was then forced to accept the appointment of a Hungarian Nazi as Prime Minister, the banning of the Social Democratic and Smallholder Parties, and the roundup and liquidation of

⁵ It was because of this conference that the two ministers Colonel Duke was supposed to meet were "out of town."

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Hungarian Jews. To ensure Horthy's compliance, Hitler ordered Colonel Otto Skorzeny to kidnap Horthy's son and hold him as a hostage.

At the time the orders were issued in Berlin to execute MARGARETHE I (as the plan for the invasion and occupation of Hungary was called), insufficient German troops were available. The forces in the West were depleted. Troops that were supposed to have been sent to reinforce defenses in France against the anticipated invasion had been diverted to the Anzio battle in Italy. Other German forces were greatly overextended in Russia and the Balkans (the latter, in anticipation of the Allied landings along the Adriatic.) Nevertheless, to execute MARGARETHE, further forces were withdrawn from these areas. Two divisions, for example, were removed from France and were not returned in time to be employed against the Normandy landings. German High Command Operations Chief, General Walther Warlimont, recalled after the war that "During the Hungarian operation, the Western front was left without a single battle-worthy, fully operational armored division at a moment when the invasion might come any day." Thus, OPERATION SPARROW triggered an unnecessary German invasion of Hungary with over 100,000 troops, including several armored divisions, that were desperately needed elsewhere.⁶

. . .

The successes achieved by the deception campaigns in World War II were realized in large measure because they could be directed against a highly centralized and concentrated totalitarian state. It was only necessary to influence Hitler and his immediate staff in order to achieve the desired results. The *Magruder Principle* was validated by PLAN ZEPPELIN. Hitler's lifelong obsession with the Balkans, the old underside of his native Austro-Hungarian Empire, his maniacal concern for petroleum his forces could no longer use, caused him to ignore the obvious indicators that there were to be no Allied attacks through the Balkans.

The Allied strategic deception campaign also offers lessons to those who would avoid falling victim to hostile deception campaigns. The intelligence establishment and its masters must deploy effective intelligence resources across a broad spectrum. They must also avoid being misled by selective consideration of information which reinforces a preconception or preferred conclusion. It is always wise and prudent to consider the capabilities of one's adversaries. The most reliable and precise intelligence concerning enemy intentions may be of great interest, but distinctly less relevant, if the capabilities to carry out the intentions are lacking. (The Allies could not have invaded the Balkans in 1944, for example, particularly after the landings in Southern France, simply because they lacked any capability to do so).

⁶ Hitler would repeat the diversion of forces into Hungary. In October 1944 a Hungarian delegation signed an armistice in Moscow and Horthy announced on the radio that Hungary was out of the war. The Germans arrested Horthy and Hitler gave orders to launch a counterattack in Hungary to secure the oilfields because he still expected an Allied counterattack through the Balkans. With Soviet forces poised to cross the Oder into Germany and the Western Allies about to cross the Rhine, the Fuhrer pulled troops from both fronts for his campaign in Hungary. These forces also included Sepp Dietrich's 6 Panzer Army, hastily withdrawn from the Ardennes campaign.

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